

Second opinion

A PAEDIATRICIAN who wrongly diagnosed dozens of children as having been sexually abused, leading to false allegations against two nursery nurses in Shieldfield, Newcastle upon Tyne, has been found guilty of serious professional misconduct.

Dr Camille De San Lazaro (pictured) has been banned from acting as an expert witness on child sexual abuse "in any legal proceedings or otherwise" for an unlimited period. The high court ruling overturns a previous decision by the General Medical Council in May 2005 that De San Lazaro was not guilty of serious professional misconduct even though the GMC had found some of her work in the Shieldfield case "inappropriate, irresponsible and unprofessional" (see *Eyes* 1133 & 1136).

The judgment followed an appeal by the Council for the Regulation of Healthcare Professionals against De San Lazaro and the GMC after a complaint by nursery workers Dawn Reed and Christopher Lillie. They brought the case after a nine-year ordeal in which they were falsely accused of sexually assaulting children in their care.

Initially they were charged with abusing six children. They were acquitted when the case went to Newcastle crown court in July 1994 when the judge



ruled video interviews with children inadmissible and the crown offered no further evidence.

After the acquittal, Newcastle city council, their employer, appointed four people – three social workers and a clinical psychologist – to review the case.

Despite Reed and Lillie's acquittal, the panel branded them as depraved and sadistic child abusers who procured children for a paedophile ring to be filmed for child pornography.

The exact number of children they were supposed to have abused was never fixed, but the number escalated from the concerns of the mother of a two year old boy to more than 60 children, many of whom were awarded compensation for abuse. De San Lazaro had examined 53 children and her medical reports confirming sexual abuse were the main evidence against Reed and Lillie.

The pair went into hiding until they sued the council and the review team for libel. In July 2002 in the high court Mr Justice Eady awarded them £200,000 each in damages.

He found the council not guilty, accepting its defence of qualified privilege in publishing the report. But he found the review team guilty of malicious libel "because they included a number of fundamental claims which they must have known to be untrue".

De San Lazaro was "unbalanced, obsessive and lacking in judgement", the judge said. "Where physical findings were negative or equivocal, Dr Lazaro was prepared to make up (for) the deficiencies by throwing objectivity and scientific rigour to the winds in a highly emotional misrepresentation of the facts."

The judge said there was no basis for the review team's allegations about the existence of a paedophile ring and concluded: "The allegations of child abuse against Christopher Lillie and Dawn Reed are untrue. They are entitled to be vindicated and recognised as innocent." De San Lazaro was suspended from her job after the 2002 libel trial but reinstated in 2004.

Despite the high court's finding in April of serious professional misconduct, De San Lazaro is still a senior lecturer and honorary consultant in paediatrics at the University of Newcastle, with clinical duties at the Royal Victoria Infirmary. The hospital trust told the *Eye* she was reinstated "because she is a competent paediatrician".